

ALL SCHOOL DRILL

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

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ALL SCHOOL DRILL

The Contra Costa County CAER (Community Awareness & Emergency Response) Group sponsored an All School Drill on October 2, 2002. The countywide drill involved more than 130¹ schools and dozens of childcare sites, including schools from 10 different school districts and two community colleges. This was the first time CCC CAER held a shelter-in-place drill with so many different sites. The drill organizers have dubbed the first year effort a huge success and CAER has committed to sponsoring the All School Drill on an annual basis.

BACKGROUND

Contra Costa is the ninth most populous county in California, with a population of 948,000². There are more than 181,000 students enrolled in public schools in Contra Costa, with nearly 20,000 students attending private schools. The largest public school district is Mt. Diablo Unified with an enrollment of more than 36,000 students, while the Canyon School District has a single school serving fewer than 100 students in kindergarten through eighth grade.

The Contra Costa CAER Group includes representatives from agencies, industries and the community. CAER funded development of a Community Warning System (CWS) for the county in the 1990's at a cost of more than \$5 million. The CWS includes outdoor alerting sirens in the industrial corridor of the county, messaging computer terminals that link city and county 911 dispatch centers with large industrial sites and regulatory agencies. The CWS also utilizes National Weather Service radios for hazardous material alerting, and it is tied in at the State level to information systems for news media messaging, the Emergency Alert System, and e-mail incident notification.

The All School Drill was organized through the joint efforts of CAER's Community Outreach and Emergency Preparedness working groups. After holding emergency preparedness workshops for schools and childcare centers across the county in 2001, CAER's goal in sponsoring an All School Drill was to encourage these sites to exercise and improve their emergency plans. Interested members from each group joined a special workgroup to plan the All School Drill. They developed a workplan for the drill that included target dates for completing activities, and captured all of the different tasks in order to have a plan in place if the drill was repeated in the future.

¹ 129 public and private schools returned participation cards, but CAER organizers reported more schools actually participated. Thirty-eight childcare centers returned participation cards.

² 2000 Census

PRE-PLANNING

CAER initially sought support for the idea of an All School Drill from the County Office of Education in March of this year. The County Superintendent of Schools presented the drill concept to public school superintendents during a monthly meeting, and planning began in earnest.

CAER mailed participation packets in August to all of the public and private schools in the county, addressed to their principals. This packet contained:

- Letter about the drill (and an upcoming drill training session) from CAER's executive director
- Color drill fliers
- Drill fact sheet
- Pre-stamped postcard to be returned to CAER
- Resource list of the various education materials available free from CAER for primary or secondary grades.

Letters were also sent to school district superintendents describing the drill plans and the packets being sent to school principals.

Another mailing was prepared for approximately 400 licensed childcare centers. This packet also included a letter, postage-paid sign-up cards, and resource material lists targeting pre-school age children. Finally, a special mailing was sent to nearly 2,000 family-run day care sites that included a "Wally Wise Guy" coloring sheet and a flier about the drill, and information on shelter-in-place. These sites could request more coloring sheets from CAER. Since these facilities were not asked to sign up for the drill by returning a postcard, the number of these locations that sheltered-in-place on October 2nd wasn't tallied.

Finally, a confirmation fax was sent to the school sites that announced the drill Model Schools and let them know their site's name was listed on the CAER Web site as a drill participant. The second page of the fax was a drill critique form prepared by CAER for use at the site to evaluate how the drill went. The fax also included information about a special test message being broadcast by the National Weather Service over weather radios in the county at 11:00 a.m. to coincide with the start time of the drill. (CAER provided weather radios for hazardous materials alerts to schools, childcare centers and other group facilities in the industrial corridor during the previous year.) In addition, the fax let the sites know how many cities were making a proclamation about the drill.

SHELTER-IN-PLACE EDUCATION DAY

To facilitate public and agency awareness about the drill, CAER decided to ask city councils and the County Board of Supervisors to proclaim October 2nd as "Shelter-In-Place Education Day." A sample proclamation was provided to make the process simpler for the government offices. The response to this request was

overwhelming, with the proclamations scheduled at meetings just prior to the drill date. All but one municipality out of 19 made the proclamation, and many of these were made at meetings televised on community access channels. Two school districts made joint resolutions about the drill with their city councils, and several school districts mandated the participation of all of their school sites.

PUBLICITY

Community announcements about the drill were run on the county's TV station, CCTV, and on several other TV community "bulletin boards." The *Contra Costa Times* newspaper ran an announcement about the drill training, which was open to the public. Both CAER and the County Office of Education issued press releases before the drill, and media kits were prepared with the press releases, drill fact sheet, Model School profiles, etc.

Fliers about the drill were distributed through government agencies, and could be downloaded from the CAER Web site. Fliers were also faxed to many school sites before the sign-up packets were mailed, as well as to childcare councils, youth detention facilities, district PTA, etc. Schools and industries with changeable signage were encouraged to post a message about the upcoming drill.

CAER featured stories about the All School Drill in its summer and fall newsletters. A sample newsletter article was distributed to community groups and businesses to include in their own publications, and an article about the drill was included in one citywide newsletter in September.

TRAINING

Contra Costa CAER holds a quarterly meeting that is open to the public and generally includes a speaker. In August, the quarterly meeting was utilized for drill training and several speakers helped present the session "Planning a Shelter-In-Place Drill."³ CAER's resource materials were available at the workshop, including its Model School Emergency Plan. More than 60 people attended this workshop.

The drill training session in August publicized the drill to school district emergency coordinators when the County Office of Education's Loss Prevention Manager cancelled his monthly meeting with them and encouraged attendance at the CAER drill training session instead.

MODEL SCHOOLS

CAER invited a school in each area of the county to be a Model School for the drill. The East County Model School was Pittsburg High School, the Central County

³ The presenters were Tony Semenza of CAER, Lonnie Karste of the Antioch Police Department, Cliff Warrick of Tesoro and Scott Etzel of Dow.

school was Martinez Junior High, and the West County Model School was Nystorm Elementary – so each grade level was included.

These schools were offered assistance from CAER in preparing for the drill, and were advised that the news media would be directed to their sites on the day of the drill. A number of CAER representatives were present at each site for the drill to assist as needed, take pictures, complete evaluation forms, etc.

MENTORING

CAER held a mentor training session in September to prepare volunteers to assist sites with shelter-in-place planning and to observe the drill. Volunteers from government, industry and the community had signed up for CAER's mentor program earlier this year. All of the drill Model Schools, and some other sites, received CAER mentoring assistance prior to the drill. CAER mentors and other observers attended the drill at various sites and completed observation forms.

DRILL ACTIVITIES

CAER suggested that participating sites shelter-in-place for about 10 minutes for the All School Drill, but there was no mandated exercise for the drill. This flexibility allowed schools and childcare centers to participate irregardless of their pre-planning level. Nearly every site conducted shelter-in-place exercises that involved the entire school population. At a minimum, teachers and students learned the basic steps of shelter-in-place and practiced them. At most sites the staff identified improvements that could be made in their emergency plans and procedures.

One local community college decided to hold a tabletop exercise to train their staff, since shelter-in-place planning was recently incorporated into their emergency planning. Other sites decided to combine the shelter-in-place drill with other needed drills such as earthquake "duck and cover" and evacuation for a fire, so they had a full-scale disaster exercise that took much more time.

For sites in the industrial corridor, the drill started at 11:00 a.m. when the outdoor safety sirens sounded the regular monthly test signal, and the National Weather Service broadcast a special test message about the drill over their weather radios.

The cities of Martinez, Pittsburg and Richmond also broadcast a message about the drill on their local emergency information (low frequency) radio stations. In these communities, anyone tuning to the city station after 8:00 a.m. heard an announcement that schools would be holding a drill. At 11:00, the message was changed again to announce the start of the drill. This was an excellent opportunity for the police departments to test their procedures for changing the message, and it helped increase school awareness about these stations as sources of emergency information.

CAER's mascot, Wally Wise Guy, made appearances at the elementary-level Model School in Richmond, and at the Open House. CCTV videotaped drill activities at a model school and at the Open House.

OPEN HOUSE

In conjunction with the drill, the Contra Costa County Office of Emergency Services hosted an Open House from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Elected officials, school district administrators, emergency response agency chiefs, members of the CAER Board of Directors and industry managers were mailed a specially designed invitation to visit the Open House and tour the county Emergency Operations Center. A variety of displays were set-up for viewing. Local school site observers stopped in at the Open House before and after going to their schools. Media kits were available at the Open House with directions to the Model School sites.

COST

Several of CAER's industrial partners mailed and copied materials, which controlled expenses for CAER. The \$1,100 cost of producing 10,000 "Wally" stickers for elementary school children to receive on the day of the drill was the single highest expense. They were deemed well worth the cost because they were highly requested by schools and popular with the kids. Increased supplies of Wally trading cards, pamphlets, fliers, etc. were produced prior to the drill. CAER hosted refreshments at the Open House, and the planning committee met several times over lunch to squeeze the extra meetings into already busy schedules. The special color stickers were the highest single expense. Direct billed expenses to CAER for the drill totaled \$2,138.52.

FOLLOW-UP

Participating schools were faxed an evaluation form shortly after the drill. CAER received 50-60 completed forms, and learned that nearly all of the responding schools supported making the All School Drill an annual event. The forms provided an important finding that a number of schools with weather radios did not receive the test message, and CAER is now following up to resolve the problems encountered. Generally the problems were related to personnel training or how the radio was set-up, but in a few cases the reception at the location was poor and an outside antenna may be needed to boost the signal.

All schools and childcare centers that signed up to participate in the drill will receive a color Certificate of Participation from CAER. These certificates are also being prepared for volunteers and key participants from school districts and other agencies.

The drill planning committee met after the drill to review how the drill went and what could be improved in the future. Their conclusions included:

The distribution of resource materials needs to be streamlined, perhaps by taking items for multiple schools to the district offices and using inter-district mail for delivery. Since CAER is updating its Web site, more resource materials should be available for downloading.

Because the proclamation process was easier than expected and very worthwhile, joint resolutions with school boards should be included next year.

Participation from schools outside of the industrial corridor was good, demonstrating they recognized that risks such as highway and rail transportation of hazardous materials require them to include shelter-in-place procedures in their planning.

Naming model schools in each area of the county was a good idea and should be included again next year.

Teachers need a shelter-in-place curriculum. CAER could facilitate this development with a team of teachers.

Sites that are not in the industrial corridor served by outdoor safety sirens should be provided with information on obtaining a weather radio so they can receive direct shelter-in-place alerts. CAER will pursue a program to offer radios to these sites at a reduced cost achieved through bulk purchase.

CAER can use photos and video of the 2002 drill for promotional materials for future drills.

Since some schools in the county are out of session during October, CAER should offer to work with each of those districts to hold a similar drill involving its sites at another time.

CONCLUSION

The All School Drill should be an annual event. It was highly successful in its first year with excellent participation, and schools that completed evaluation forms were nearly unanimous in their support for having this drill every year. There are many opportunities to include more sites in future years. Participation in the drill improved each site's shelter-in-place plan and its implementation, and the participants viewed CAER's resource materials and promotional items as valuable. Future drills should continue to improve shelter-in-place capabilities in schools and childcare centers, while increasing public awareness about Contra Costa CAER and its shelter-in-place resources.

ALL SCHOOL DRILL PLANNING WORKGROUP

Nancy Ross, Tesoro
Chair, Community Outreach Group

Mark Ayers, ChevronTexaco
Chair, Emergency Preparedness Group

Chris Bowman, ConocoPhillips

Kathryn Gerk, City of Richmond OES

Lisa Lindsey, ConocoPhillips

Tom McKnight, Shell

Pat Pava, CCC OES

Joan Sieczkowski, CCC Office of Education

John Stretch, Martinez Police Department

Alonzo Terry, CCC Sheriff's Office

Tony Semenza
Executive Director, CCC CAER

Lori McDonald
Executive Assistant, CCC CAER

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Drill Fact Sheet
- B. Drill Flier (1)
- C. Drill Flier (2)
- D. List of Participating Schools
- E. List of Participating Childcare Centers
- F. Sample Proclamation Language
- G. Letter to Principal with Resource List and Sample Letter to Parents
- H. Letter to Childcare Center with Resource List and Sample Letter to Parents
- I. Mailing to Family Run Day Cares
- J. Training session flier
- K. CAER Newsletter article
- L. CCC Office of Education Press Release
- M. CCC CAER Press Release
- N. OES Open House Invitation
- O. Wally Stickers Ordered for Drill
- P. Reminder Fax
- Q. Confirmation Fax
- R. Site Critique Form
- S. Drill Survey Form
- T. Sample Certificate of Participation
- U. Post-Drill Survey Results Summary
- V. News Articles
- W. Drill Photos